

Merchant and Nuuanu Streets --  
T. R. Foster Building  
902 Nuuanu Street  
Honolulu  
Honolulu County  
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-55 L

HABS  
HI,  
2-HONLU,  
18-L-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013

HABS  
HI,  
2-HONOLU,  
18-L-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERCHANT AND NUUANU STREETS COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS  
T. R. FOSTER BUILDING

HABS No. HI-55 L

Location: 902 Nuuanu Street, City & County of Honolulu, Hawaii.  
Zone 1, Sec. 7, Plat 02, Tax Key #35

Present Owner: William Burgess  
Davies Pacific Center, Suite 905  
Honolulu, HI.

Present Occupant  
and Use: O'Toole's Restaurant

Significance: The T. R. Foster building was commissioned by the Inter-Island Steamship Navigation Company, one of the most successful steamship companies of the late nineteenth century, as a memorial to its founder. It was rented as a warehouse to Lovejoy, a shipping company, and subsequently served as commercial space for other businesses.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1891. The building's date is inscribed on the Nuuanu Street facade. [Thrum's Annual, 1892.]
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners:

1891	Inter-Island Steam Navigation Co. erected the building.
1920	passed to Mary E. Foster Estate
1964	sold to Bishop Estate
1970	sold to Merchant Square Associates
1984	sold to William Burgess

[Building permits, Tax records, Historic Hawaii Foundation File, "Merchant Square", and Historic Hawaii News, 2-1981.]
4. Original plans and construction: Constructed as a two-story brick building with a commercial storefront on the ground floor, the elaborate parapet and cornice and second-floor facade are virtually unchanged.

6. Alterations: In 1950 a mezzanine floor was constructed over the first floor. In 1970 the interior was remodeled by the architecture firm of Charles R. Sutton to adapt it to restaurant use. The second floor remained office space, through small-scale renovations. [Building permit 1-7-02-35, #'s 117653, 91054, 89474, 89472, 10786, 4362, 87491, 214908, 161318, 101709.]

B. Historical Context:

Beginning in the 1850s, California-based steamship companies attempted to begin a Hawaiian inter-island steamer service. All ventures were unsuccessful at long-term operation, however, due to the high costs involved which could not be regained through the shipping itself. In 1867, the Hawaiian legislature agreed to subsidize such a service, which encouraged further attempts, with increased Hawaiian participation. On September 16, 1876, the Hawaiian government and the United States signed the Reciprocity Treaty, which ushered in a new, stronger trade operation in the islands. Immediately thereafter, in 1877, S. G. Wilder purchased the first vessel for what was to become the fleet of the Wilder Steamship Company. In 1878 T. R. Foster followed suit, and incorporated the Inter-Island Steamship Navigation Company, Ltd., on February 7, 1883.

From their inception, Inter-Island and Wilder competed as the two most successful steamship companies in the islands, although making claim to different ports. Wilder Steamship Company served the island of Maui and the windward ports of the island of Hawaii; Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company served the island of Kauai and the Kona and Kau ports of the island of Hawaii. By 1904 both companies had seven vessels in their fleets.

In 1905, the companies joined forces, under the control and name of Inter-Island Steamship Navigation Company, Ltd. They reorganized to accommodate the increase in business, particularly passenger travel. On December 7, 1941, the fleet of steamers was called into active war service, chartered by the U. S. government. [Thrum's Annual, 1889, and Welty.] The company continued inter-island service until the 1950s. [City directories.]

T. R. Foster had died in 1889. In 1891, the company he had formed constructed this brick building in his memory, bearing his name, at the corner of Nuuanu and Marine streets. It was rented to the Lovejoy Shipping Company, which remained its tenant until 1918, for warehouse space. [Thrum's Annual, 1892, p. 130, and Directories, 1892-1919.]

Upon Lovejoy's closing in 1919, the T. R. Foster building continued to be rental office and storage space, occupied by a wholesale liquor business, a travel agency, and other businesses. In 1979 the ground floor was converted to a restaurant, the second floor remaining office space. The building remains in this plan and usage. [Maps, Tax records, and Building permits.]

Report prepared by Laura S. Alderman, Project Historian.

For background information on this downtown neighborhood, see HABS No. HI-55.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The T. R. Foster building is a well-proportioned two-story combination office and commercial building. The articulating elements of cast-iron and concrete stand out against the exposed brick surface.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 40'-8" across the front by approximately 45' deep and approximately 37' high. There are six bays in a rhythm of ABAABA (with A being 5'-4" and B being 5'-0" between the 1'-2" pilasters.)
2. Foundations: Inaccessible for study.
3. Walls: The walls are of exposed brick with contrasting articulation executed in cast-iron (first floor) and concrete (above first floor).

In composition there are two bays across the first-floor street front. Each of these bays is divided into three sub-bays by flat board mullions corresponding in position to the pilasters above. The major first-floor pilasters (at center and each end) are of cast-iron with Corinthianesque caps.

The second floor has six bays separated by pilasters with Corinthianesque caps. Classical elements are abstracted. Each bay contains a single window. The upper facade has a cornice topped by a parapet, the steps of which correspond to the bays below. The center two bays are topped by a pediment carried on short Corinthianesque pilaster forms.

4. Structural system, framing: The building has brick bearing walls with wood joists spanning from side to side. The roof framing is not visible but appears to have trusses spanning the width of the building.
  5. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: The entrance into the first-floor restaurant is located in the second sub-bay from the left on the front elevation. The recessed door has four panels; the flanks of the recess are paneled. There is a transom. This is all new material. The entrance to the second floor is on the Marine Street side elevation, near the rear. It has a plain segmental-arched opening containing double wood and glass doors under a transom. A former doorway to the front of this side elevation has been filled in with a stucco panel. It is an unadorned segmentally arched opening.
    - b. Windows: Each bay of the upper main facade has a single window with wood double-hung sash. The top sash is segmental to correspond with the opening itself. One window has one-over-two-light sash, the remainder are one-over-one-light. The opening has a keystone and paneled voussoir arch. A concrete sill also serves as a belt course for the facade.
  6. Roof:
    - a. Shape and covering: The gable roof with the ridge extending front to back has composition roofing.
    - b. Cornice, eaves, parapets: There is a parapet around the entire building. The stepped parapet on the front is articulated with decorative elements including the cornice, balusters, pediment and raised panels. The pediment's tympanum has "T. R. Foster" above "1891" in raised letters and numerals. A short tower-like form rises from the peak of the pediment. Atop the pilasters dividing the parapet are balls on pedestals.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Plans: The first floor has been altered to function as a restaurant with the dining room in the front right-hand side and the bar to the left, and services to the rear. The second floor is accessible from the side (Marine Street) and is divided into offices around a common office area.
  2. Stairways: There is a quarter turn stairway in the left rear corner of the building.

3. Flooring: There are wood floors with carpet on the second floor. First floor has vinyl tile over concrete in the bar area and carpet over frame in the dining room (elevated one riser).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Second-floor spaces have plaster surfaces. The first floor has exposed brick exterior walls with plaster for partitions and plaster ceilings.

D. Site:

The building sits on the corner of Marine and Nuuanu Streets on the Ewa side of Nuuanu Street in the Chinatown Historic District and the Merchant Street National Register district. It is contiguous to the Nippu Jiji building to the right (mauka direction) with Marine Street to the left (makai direction). It sits to the front property line and there is a small two-story brick building behind which is functionally linked to this structure. The sidewalk is of 14" square granite paving slabs. There are three trees planted in the sidewalk.

In this description, local designation is given for orientation. "Mauka" means mountain direction, "Makai" means sea direction, "Diamond Head" means in the direction of Diamond Head crater, "Ewa" means in the direction of the town of Ewa (opposite Diamond Head direction).

Report prepared by Robert C. Giebner, Project Supervisor.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

From the Bishop Museum Photograph Collection:

Files: "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant S. 1900-",  
"Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Nuuanu Ave. Downtown Area."

Album 12, Page 31, "B. Mus. 1006, Gartley 197. Nuuanu Street,  
Honolulu, ca 1890?"

Baker, Ray Jerome. Honolulu Then and Now. #31118.

B. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Hawaii Directories, 1891-present. Hawaii State Archives and Bishop Museum Library.

Maps: Lion Fire Insurance Company, 1879, Bishop Museum Map Collection.

B. F. Dillingham Fire Insurance Company for Board of Fire Underwriters of Honolulu, 1900, and 1906 corrected to 1911. Bishop Museum Map Collection and Hawaii State Archives.

Tax Records, Tax Assessor's office, 842 Bethel Street, Honolulu, Hawaii. Records for "Zone 1, Sec. 7, Plat 02, Tax Key #35."

Building Permits, Municipal Building, Honolulu, Hawaii. #'s 117653, 91054, 89474, 89472, 10786, 4362, 87491, 214908, 161318, 101709.

Hawaii State Archives "Historic Buildings Task Force" File "TMK 1-7-02-35". University of Hawaii architecture student's 1966 report on Foster building.

Historic Hawaii Foundation File "Merchant Square". Contains information regarding recent ownership and usage.

C. Secondary and Published Sources:

Historic Hawaii News

2-1981

11-1985

Thrum, Thomas, Hawaiian Almanac and Annual. Honolulu: Black & Auld Printers, 1889, p.79, 1890, p.100, and 1892, p.130.

Welty, Earl M., Inter-Island and the Hawaiian Islands, 1945.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by First American Title Co., Historic Hawaii Foundation, and the National Park Service. Recorded under the direction of Kenneth L. Anderson, Chief of HABS, and Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, the project was completed during the summer of 1987 at the Honolulu field office. Project supervisor was Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona); project historian was Laura S. Alderman (Washington, D.C.); architectural foreman was J. Scott Anderson (Washington, D.C.); and architectural technicians were Coy E. Burney (University of Maryland), Kenneth R. Imoehl (University of Arizona), and Michel A. van Ackere (Brown University).

ADDENDUM TO:  
MERCHANT & NUUANU STREETS, T. R. FOSTER BUILDING  
(T. R. Foster Building)  
902 Nuuanu Street  
Honolulu  
Honolulu County  
Hawaii

HABS HI-55-L  
*HI, 2-HONLU, 18-L-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001